



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 114

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "STRENGTH-BASED" ORGANIZATION (PART 8)

The First Key: Select for Talent Talent: How Great Managers Define It

"Why does every role, performed at excellence, require talent?"

Normally we associate talent only with celebrated excellence -- with a strong emphasis on the word "celebrated." We look at Michael Jordan, swaying and knifing his way to the basket, and we know that neither his training nor his dogged determination are the prime source of his brilliance. He may have both of these, but, then, so do most other NBA players. Alone, these cannot explain why Michael shines. Deep down we know that his secret weapon is his talent. We look at Robert De Niro and we think the same: he has talent. Tiger Woods, Jay Leno, Maya Angelou, they are all part of the talent club. They are blessed with a secret gift. For most of us, talent seems a rare and precious thing, bestowed on special, far-away people. They are different, these people with talent. They are "not us."

Great managers disagree with this definition of talent. It is too narrow, too specialized. Instead, they define a talent as: Any recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior that can be productively applied. The emphasis here is on the word "recurring." Your talents, they say, are the behaviors you find yourself doing often. You have a mental filter that sifts through your world, forcing you to pay attention to some stimuli, while others slip past you, unnoticed. Your instinctive ability to remember names, rather than just faces, is a talent. Your need to alphabetize your spice rack and color code your wardrobe is a talent. So is your love of crossword puzzles, or your fascination with risk, or your impatience. Any recurring patterns of behavior that can be productively applied are talents. **The key to excellent performance is finding the match between your talents and your role.**

This definition of talent is deceptively neutral, almost bland. Nevertheless, it guides great managers toward a momentous discovery: Every role, performed at excellence, requires talent; because every role, performed at excellence, requires certain recurring patterns of thought, feeling or behavior. This means that great nurses have talent. So do great truck drivers and great teachers, great housekeepers and great flight attendants.

Regardless of the role and regardless of whether the excellence is "celebrated" or anonymous, great managers know that excellence is impossible without talent.

Three Kinds of Talent

Gallup studied the talents of over 150 distinct roles and, in the process, identified a multitude of different talents. As you would imagine, the talents needed to excel at these roles varies greatly -- an all-star goalie in the NHL possesses rather different talents than an excellent fireman; the best nurses are not cut from the same cloth as the best stockbrokers.

Gallup simplify these diverse talents into three basic categories: **Striving** talents, **Thinking** talents, and **Relating** talents.

Striving talents explain the Why of a person. They explain why he gets out of bed everyday, why he is motivated to push and push, just that little bit harder. Is he driven by his desire to stand out, or is good enough good enough for him? Is he intensely competitive, or intensely altruistic or both? Does he define himself by his technical competence, or does he just want to be liked?

Thinking talents explain the How of a person. They explain how she thinks, how she weighs up alternatives, how she comes to his decisions. Is she focused, or does she like to leave all of her options open? Is she disciplined and structured, or does she love surprises? Is she a linear, practical thinker, or is she strategic, always playing mental "what if?" games with herself?

Relating talents explain the Who of a person. They explain who he trusts, who he builds relationships with, who he confronts, and who he ignores. Is he drawn to win over strangers, or is he only at ease with his close friends? Does he think that trust must be earned, or does he extend trust to everyone in the belief that most will prove worthy of it? Does he confront people dispassionately, or does he avoid confrontation until finally exploding in an emotional tirade?

Striving, Thinking and Relating. These are the three basic categories of talent. Within each, you will have your own, unique combination of four-lane highways and barren wastelands. No matter how much you might yearn to be different, your combination of talents, and the recurring behaviors that it creates, will remain stable, familiar to you and to others throughout your life.

Next: The Second Key: Define the Right Outcomes.

Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: "*First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*"

For more information about the research and book 'First Break All the Rules' please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>

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